Towards Physically Active Children and Youth in Nova Scotia

NOVA SCOTIA

Sport and Recreation Commission

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Section 1

The Commitment by the Nova Scotia government to Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Goal: ***To reduce the number of physically inactive children by 10 per cent by the year 2005.***

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE, 2001

Participating in sport, recreation, and fitness helps build healthier bodies and sharper minds. To encourage both young and old to become more active, we will work closely with our schools, Community Health Boards, municipal and nationa partners, as well as sport and recreation associations across the province, to develop an effective strategy that will provide Nova Scotians with more access to both indoor and outdoor sport and recreational activities.

BUDGET SPEECH 2001

This budget increases funding to the Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission by $500,000, with the assurance that every penny will find its way to communities. It will support physical fitness and active living. Increasing activity among young Nova Scotians will be the priority.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS PLAN 2001 - 2002

Implement a provincial Physical Activity Strategy for Children and Youth that will support communities and organizations in their efforts to encourage Nova Scotians to increase their activity levels.

Section 2

What we know about Physical Activity in Children & Youth

In 1999, a forum of researchers in partnership with Nova Scotia government agencies and Dalhousie University recommended that, to achieve desired health benefits, children and youth require 60 minutes of accumulated moderate physical activity on a daily basis. Health Canada is currently working on Canadian guidelines for children and youth, and is expected to release its findings in the fall of 2001.

CURRENT STATUS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- It is estimated that only 1/3 of children and youth are active enough for health benefits. Girls are much less active than boys, especially teenage girls.
- Inactive kids become inactive adults
- The rise in child obesity rates is well documented
- Sedentary lifestyles are becoming the norm - television, computers, video games, and use of cars
- The Health Education Authority in the UK published a policy framework on Physical Activity for Children and Youth in 1998. Psychological well-being, self esteem, social development and crime prevention, weight and obesity reduction, and prevention of chronic disease risk factors are cited as primary benefits.
- The health and social benefits of physical activity for children and youth is not as well documented as it is for adults.

WHAT INFLUENCES PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

Action to improve healthy physical activity in children and youth is, and must be, a shared responsibility among families, sport and recreation organizations, youth organizations, the education sector, municipal government departments such as recreation, planning and public works, health service and promotion organizations, mass media, and provincial government departments.

Research and experience has taught us that a range of factors influence physical activity. At the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research a Youth

Physical Activity Promotion Model was developed. A modified list of factors include:

Predisposing factors

- Perceptions of confidence in their ability to be active
- Belief that it will be fun

Reinforcing factors

- Family
- Peers,
- Coaches
- Teachers
- Health professionals
- Youth leaders
- Media

Enabling factors

- Fitness levels
- Having the skills
- Access to community opportunities for informal and formal sport and recreation
- Physical environment - easy and safe places to walk, cycle, play

Personal demographics

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity/culture
- Socio-economic

Section 3

Our experience in Nova Scotia

We have a number of initiatives underway in Nova Scotia. The existing system of sport and recreation organizations, municipal recreation departments, youth groups (such as Scouts and Guides), and schools provides opportunities for children and youth. There is significant growth in the development and promotion of walking and hiking opportunities . School physical education, sport teams and intramurals provide other opportunities for physical activity.

Special initiatives for children and youth have been, or are, taking place in various parts of the province.

- bicycle lanes in Wolfville
- youth drop in centre in Chester
- healthy Schools initiative in Halifax Regional Municipality
- Sports for Kids at the Digby Boys and Girls Club
- training for playground leaders at Coldbrook Elementary school
- local Kidsport program in Shelburne
- bicycle exchange program in Sydney
- pilot project to measure activity levels using accelerometers in 4 schools in HRM
- Sport Nova Scotia's Kidsport initiative to raise funds for children who can't afford to participate
- On the Move initiatives for girls in several locations
- Building a Healthier Community initiative in Antigonish

Section 4

A Vision for Developing a Nova Scotia Strategy

- Physical activity is a long-term investment in the health and well-being of the people of Nova Scotia.
- Nova Scotia should have a reputation as a province which values physical activity for its children and youth
- Maximize opportunity for input from stakeholders, such as parents, sport and recreation leaders, youth leaders, health groups. Listen to youth in a variety of ways - focus groups, internet, etc. Go where youth are. Reach out.
- The strategy will be based on the best available evidence and the readiness of families, communities and organizations to accept the challenge.
- The strategy needs to be dynamic, evolving, changing, and passionate.
- Develop policy and commitment about the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government organizations that influence opportunities for physical activity.
- Process should identify, build and sustain capacity of groups - recreation, sport, health, youth groups, and community - to work together.
- Identify a mechanism for coordination and leadership in the province.
- Will need to be inclusive - interventions for target groups in the population may be required.
- The strategy should complement existing initiatives and systems, e.g. the forthcoming Children's Physical Activity Guide by Health Canada and CSEP, the emerging Sport Canada national sport policy with a focus on participation, and the commitment by government to reduce inactivity by 10 per cent.
- Have a mechanism for evaluating success, including the surveillance system.
- The strategy is about more than spending money. Awareness of the issue and mobilizing ourselves to create change is critical.

Section 5

Immediate actions

SURVEILLANCE PROJECT ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Physical inactivity is an independent risk factor for heart disease, and because of the high prevalence of inactivity among Nova Scotian adults (i.e. 65 per cent are inactive) a surveillance system is required.

To monitor change and the impact of programs and services, surveillance will focus on activity levels of children and youth. Equally, there is a need to ensure knowledge about healthy physical activity begins at a young age and continues into adulthood.

In cooperation with several government departments and four Nova Scotia universities, a plan has been developed to measure physical activity levels of approximately 2,500 school aged children in Nova Scotia in the fall of 2001. Dr Phil Campagna of Dalhousie University's School of Health and Human Performance is the Principal Investigator. In addition, researchers from Dalhousie, Acadia, UCCB and St. FX are supporting the project. Support and direction is provided by the Sport and Recreation Commission, and the Departments of Health and Education.

A unique aspect of the surveillance project will be the use of an objective measuring device, the accelerometer. It is a sophisticated pedometer that provides a seven-day profile of each child's physical activity based on intensity, frequency, duration and time of day.

FUNDING FOR 2001-2002

Through the Sport and Recreation Commission, government will provide up to $500,000 for initiatives supporting physical activity for children and youth. Excellent examples of community initiatives are already underway. Others are in need of funding to get started.

Initiatives will be funded in areas that address key factors, such as those described in the Youth Physical Activity Promotion Model of this report. Specific criteria, eligibility and deadlines will be announced in the near future.

LONG TERM STRATEGY BY A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE CHILDREN AND YOUTH (PACY) WORKING GROUP

While we can, and will, fund some immediate projects, there is a need for a long-term strategy if we are to create change. The Minister responsible for

Sport and Recreation will appoint a 7 to 9 member PACY Working Group, with representation from sport and recreation, health, education, youth, and other interested sectors. The chair of the PACY Working Group is Michael Arthur, Director of Community Development, Sport and Recreation Commission.

The PACY Working Group's mandate will be to develop a provincial strategy, along with funding recommendations that will move towards the vision. As indicated in the vision, the PACY Working Group will be asked to provide maximum opportunity for public input.

In particular, ample opportunity will be given to children and youth to have their say in a way that is non-threatening. Through traditional and electronic means, existing youth groups and organizations, i.e. scouts, guides, school classes, sport teams, etc., will be asked for their input. An early meeting with the Nova Scotia Youth Advisory Council on this issue has been scheduled.

The completed provicial physical activity strategy will be presented to the minister in December, 2001.

MINISTER'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Minister will form an Advisory Committee of high profile Nova Scotians to advise him on the provincial physical activity strategy. A number of people have been suggested and an announcement will be made shortly.

The Advisory Committee will also provide a "sounding board" for the PACY Working Group as it develops the strategy.